

VZCZCXRO0843
PP RUEHMA
DE RUEHUJA #0747/01 1091540
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 191540Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9234
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW 0257
RUEHCD/AMCONSUL CIUDAD JUAREZ 0253
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS 6636
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000747

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR DRL, AF/W
DOL FOR SUDHA DALEY
DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ELAB](#) [NI](#) [ELECTIONS](#)
SUBJECT: RELIGIOUS AND LABOR GROUPS SPEAK OUT ON 4/14
ELECTIONS

REF: ABUJA 725 AND PREVIOUS

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Strong public statements were issued on April 17 by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and on April 18 jointly by the two predominant Muslim and Christian organizations (the Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)). Both statements urge the GoN to reverse unfair decisions in the April 14 state elections and to take steps necessary to ensure improvements before the April 21 Presidential and National Assembly elections. As well, both statements applaud the independence of the Supreme Court in issuing its April 16 judgment against INEC's disqualification of candidates and the professionalism of the media. Both include an appeal to Nigerians to use peaceful means to defend their right to vote, with the NLC statement calling on Nigerians to peacefully protest. As well, the NLC statement includes a firm warning to the GoN that a repeat of April 14 problems "may spell doom for the country." END SUMMARY.

The NLC Statement

¶2. (SBU) In a strong public statement issued April 17, the NLC called the "manipulation and massive electoral fraud" of April 14 a "source of major national crisis," claiming the state elections will be remembered as the most massively rigged in Nigerian history. The statement explicitly states that the NLC "considers the April 14 elections not/not to have been free and fair." It calls on the GoN and INEC to reverse "all decisions that have upturned the will of the people" and demands redress in all cases of rigging and injustice. "Clear manipulations and fraud" are noted in Anambra, Adamawa, Edo, Enugu, Delta, Kogi, Imo and Ondo states. The NLC places blame for the failure of the elections on the Presidency, INEC, Army, SSS and police.

¶3. (SBU) The NLC statement calls on the Nigerian people to use "all peaceful means at their disposal, including protests, to defend their votes and protect their mandate." In urging the GoN to ensure that all eligible candidates are on the April 21 ballot, the statement explicitly "warns" that attempts to repeat the problems of April 14 will "spell doom for the country." It praises the independence of the judiciary and, in particular, the April 16th Supreme Court decision that INEC cannot disqualify candidates, and urges the judiciary to remain steadfast in dispensing with all electoral cases. As well, the statement thanks the media for its forthrightness and professionalism.

The Joint Muslim/Christian Statement

¶4. (SBU) In a joint statement titled "A Betrayed Trust," NSCIA and CAN expressed their displeasure with what they termed "INEC's cocktail of misrepresentation." Citing "massive subversion of the people's will through a collaboration of agents of state and gangs masquerading as the ruling party," the two organizations called for the reversal of results in ten states: Anambra, Adamawa, Edo, Enugu, Delta, Ondo, Rivers, Imo, Kogi, and Nasarawa. They noted that the experiences of 1983 and 2003 were "replayed with more impunity displayed." The two religious organizations described the two most disturbing problems as the absence of a credible voters register and the scarcity of results tally sheets. In previous elections, they note, the tally sheets have been the central evidence for those seeking redress in election tribunals. Despite the lack of tally sheets for some polling stations, the two groups maintain these same sheets "surfaced at collation centers and INEC state headquarters respectively at the close of the day's polls."

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¶5. (SBU) While noting that in some areas the police and security personnel were friendly and attentive, the NSCIA and CAN also noted a high level of "raw and naked force" designed to intimidate voters. They applauded the mass media for its patriotism and professionalism, as well as the Supreme Court for its independence in delivering its April 16 decision on INEC's disqualification of candidates. The statement calls on NSCIA and CAN followers to "be steadfast in the discharge of their civic responsibility by voting in Saturday's national elections while eternal vigilance must be sustained to ensure their mandate is not so crudely and primitively taken away."

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT. These two public statements reflect the high level of frustration with the April 14 polls. Despite a nationwide ban on protests, the NLC statement explicitly calls for protests and both documents call on Nigerians to defend their vote and their mandate. How much momentum these calls pick up and what the reaction of the Nigerian people will be to Saturday's national elections will depend to a great extent on public perceptions of the level of rigging. If improvements are not seen between the April 14 and the April 21 elections, we can expect even stronger statements after April 21 and possibly action on the part of Nigerians. Whether that action will continue in the form of the serious, sporadic violence experienced thus far, or escalate into something more remains to be seen. END COMMENT.
CAMPBELL